News

A bald man in white vestments holds a paten and speaks. Other priests in white surround him

Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville, the fifth bishop of Houma-Thibodaux, La., has passed away at age 63. He died Jan. 19, 2023, from complications related to recent health problems, the diocese announced. He is seen celebrating his installation Mass March 29, 2023, at the Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales in Houma. (OSV News photo/Lawrence Chatagnier, Bayou Catholic)

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Bishop Mario E. Dorsonville of Houma-Thibodaux, Louisiana, passed away unexpectedly late Jan 19 due to complications from recent health problems, according to a post from the diocese. He was 63.

Dorsonville had headed the diocese as its fifth bishop just under a year since his installation on March 29, 2023. Prior to that, the bishop had served as auxiliary bishop for the Archdiocese of Washington for eight years since his appointment in 2015.

"It is with great sadness and deep shock that I announce to you that our beloved Shepherd, Bishop Mario Dorsonville, passed away at 6:50 pm this evening after he

gave in to complications arising from recent health problems," Fr. Simon Peter Engurait, the diocese's vicar general, said in posting the news of the bishop's death on social media Jan. 19.

"My heart is broken as I make this news to you as this is not the kind of message any one of us would expect to receive," he wrote. "I am aware that you will have a lot of questions on your mind. I ask that you be patient with us as we begin to navigate through these uncertain moments. In the meantime, I ask that you keep him in your prayers."

No funeral arrangements have been announced but the diocese said in a statement it expected the funeral "to fall at the end of January and the ceremonies to be local."

Bishop Michael G. Duca of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, said in a statement Jan. 19, "I was deeply saddened to hear of the untimely death of my brother bishop Mario Dorsonville of Houma-Thibodaux. The faithful of the Diocese of Baton Rouge join me in prayer for the people of his diocese who have embraced him so lovingly during his short time among them. May he rest eternally in the arms of our Lord and Savior."

Washington Auxiliary Bishop Juan Esposito-Garcia, vicar general and moderator of the curia for the archdiocese, remembered Dorsonville in a Jan. 20 email to the priests and members of the archdiocese.

"Those who were touched by Bishop Dorsonville came to know what a special soul he is," Esposito-Garcia wrote. "His friendliness, cordial smile and gracious kindness warmed the hearts of everyone who encountered him. A priest forever by virtue of his ordination, he was a good and faithful servant of the Lord he loved so well and served with such fervent dedication."

On the national level, Dorsonville was a vocal advocate for immigration reform in the U.S. and served as chairman of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops' Committee on Migration from 2019 to 2022. He also served as a member of the USCCB's Committee on Domestic Justice and Human Development, Committee on Migration and Refugees, Committee on Religious Liberty and the Ad Hoc Committee Against Racism.

The Catholic Legal Immigration Network Inc., or CLINIC, mourned the bishop's passing in a statement Jan. 21.

"Bishop Dorsonville, a cherished member of CLINIC's Board of Directors, was not only a steadfast supporter of our mission of welcome but also an integral part of our organizational fabric," wrote Anna Gallagher, executive director of CLINIC. "His unique perspective, rooted in his personal immigrant journey as a native son of Colombia, enriched our Board discussions. Personally, I will deeply miss his impassioned contributions, and CLINIC will forever be grateful for the wisdom and guidance he generously shared with us over the years. As we extend our heartfelt prayers for the repose of Bishop Dorsonville, we also hold his parishioners, loved ones, and Brother Bishops close to our hearts during this difficult time."

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Dorsonville was born Oct. 31, 1960 in Bogotá, Colombia, and was the only child of Leonor M. Rodríguez and Carlos J. Dorsonville. He was ordained to the priesthood on Nov. 23, 1985, in Bogotá.

He served Bogotá parishes in various roles, first as parochial vicar of Immaculate Heart of Mary Parish in 1986 then as pastor of San Jose de Calasanz Parish from 1987 to 1991. He also was associate chaplain at the National University of Colombia in Bogotá during this time and taught as a professor of business ethics at the university from 1990 to 1991.

He also continued his studies and received a licentiate in sacred theology from the Pontificia Universidad Javeriana de Bogotá in 1991 and a doctorate in ministry from The Catholic University of America in 1996.

During his time at The Catholic University of America from 1992 to 1994, he served the Hispanic community at Jesus the Good Shepherd Parish in Alexandria, Virginia, and Christ the Redeemer Parish in Sterling, Virginia. He also served as a lecturer at the Inter-American Development Bank headquarters in Washington and as professor of theology and catechesis at the Institute for Hispanic Pastoral Studies of Arlington from 1993 to 1994.

He returned to Colombia for a year from 1995 to 1996 to take on the role of chaplain and professor of business ethics at the National University of Colombia. He also was a professor of pastoral counseling and catechesis at the Major Seminary of the Archdiocese of Bogotá during that time.

Dorsonville returned to the Archdiocese of Washington and was appointed as parochial vicar of Our Lady of Lourdes Parish in Bethesda, Maryland in 1997 and served there until 2004. He was parochial vicar of St. Mark the Evangelist Parish in Hyattsville, Maryland from 2004 to 2005.

He held a number of other positions in the archdiocese, including serving as a member of the board of directors for Carroll Publishing Company from 2001 to 2004. He was vice president of Catholic Charities for the archdiocese and director of the Spanish Catholic Center from 2005 to 2015.

He received an executive certificate in nonprofit management at Georgetown University in 2009 and was an adjunct spiritual director of St. John Paul II Seminary in Washington from 2011 to 2015. He also served as a mentor for newly ordained priests.

In his first homily to his new flock during his installation Mass at the Cathedral of St. Francis de Sales in Houma, Dorsonville said, "I am so grateful for your kindness in welcoming me to this great state of Louisiana. It is your home and now it is mine too. I realize that a new chapter of my life has begun, knowing that the book gets better as the book goes on."

Promising that "from now on you are in my prayers," Dorsonville called on his new family of faith to "walk together to answer God's call to continue to build up the church we love … if we do that together we will be closer to holiness."